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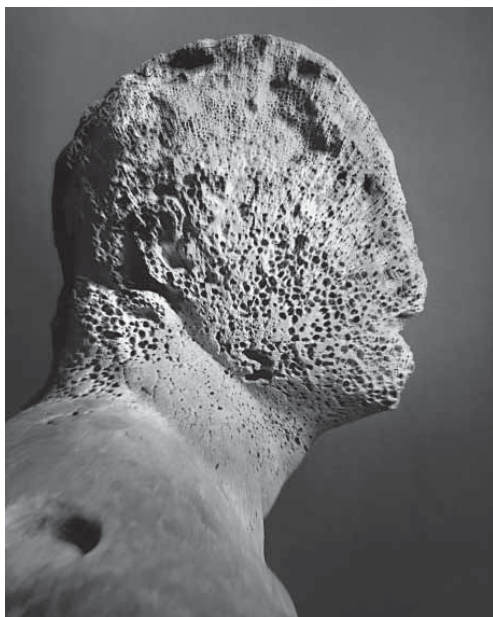
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mito mediterraneo



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Il compagno di Ulisse, Baia, 1993
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Ultima fermata Costantinopoli

Serena Acciai

Hai detto: "Per altre terre andrò per altro mare"
Altra Città più amabile di questa...

(...) Non troverai altro luogo non troverai
altro mare.

La Città ti verrà dietro.

K. Kavafis

*Istanbul, la Città dove la geografia provoca
la storia* ha scritto Brodskij.

Pera, Stambul, Scutari una Trinità per
Le Corbusier.

La fata dai mille amanti per i Turchi.

Ummelunià, la madre del mondo nel
Corano.

Una e Trina per Umberto Eco, che spiega
come la città diviene per l'Occidente
luogo mitico e fascinoso, quando diventa
simbolo della grandezza ottomana, e
capitale dell'Anticristo musulmano.

È forse anche così che nei secoli nasce
il mito di Costantinopoli, grazie agli occhi
di coloro che l'avevano raggiunta, i
viaggiatori, gli scrittori e gli architetti che
l'hanno amata, raccontata, disegnata e
che hanno così contribuito ad accrescerne
il fascino. *Città delle città* per alcuni,
per Mehmet II che la conquistò, fu sogno
e sposa desiderata per lunghi anni, come
per N. Hikmet che non smise mai di cantarla
durante la prigionia e l'esilio.

Città che si è costruita su se stessa,
e che vive come ha sempre vissuto,
non per sostituzione ma per aggiunta.¹
Città dove l'antico veramente produce
progetto, il cui karma sta nell'essere
incontro di civiltà, quel Ponte che anche
Pamuk vede nella sua Istanbul.²

*In questo porto che in realtà è un mosaico
di porti*,³ in questa città fatta di tante
città che poi sono una sola, esistono
dei caratteri che distinguono l'architettura:
innanzi tutto la presenza costante
dell'acqua, che anche come orizzonte
transita tra il tessuto costruito e poi

ancora il lascito della città antica ossia
l'erosione del classicismo come principio
di architettura.

Sedad Hakki Eldem architetto di Istanbul,
che lavora per e con Istanbul per tutta
la sua lunga vita, realizza proprio nella
metropoli sul Bosforo le sue migliori
architetture. Frammenti di città costruita
che s'inseriscono, come apporti del
Moderno, in quella genealogia di architetture
che costituiscono l'evoluzione della città
nel tempo.⁴

Architetto aristocratico, discendente da
una facoltosa famiglia ottomana, S.H.E.
si forma tra Monaco e l'Accademia di
Belle Arti di Istanbul e molto giovane inizia
a disegnare le grandi architetture della
città, a partire dal palazzo Topkapi. S.H.E.
legge la sua città da ottomano ma anche
e soprattutto attraverso i rilievi, i disegni,
le incisioni degli studiosi occidentali.

Per tutti quelli di Müller-Wiener archeologo
tedesco che ridisegna tutta Sultanahmet,
come l'antico fosse oggi.⁵ E ancora
I. Melling, architetto tedesco che nel XIX
arrivò a Istanbul per un breve soggiorno
e vi rimase per 18 anni a tracciare i paesaggi
del Bosforo.

S.H.E. fu intimamente coinvolto nella
vicenda architettonica e urbana della
città e della sua memoria. Lavorò per
Istanbul attraverso quegli elementi che
A. Rossi dice costitutivi dell'architettura
di una città: *monumenti* e *case* e le sue
architetture restano ancora oggi, nelle
varie zone della città, come declinazioni
dell'immagine dell'epoca e della società,
che lo stesso S.H.E. voleva, quasi
come un fermo immagine, mettere a
disposizione dei più.

È la vicenda del Palazzo di Giustizia di
Sultanahmet (progetto che si protrasse per
20 anni), tanto è stratificata l'architettura



1



2



3

The whole materials (photos, plans, sketches) for the essay by Serena Acciai on the work, life and experience of Sedad Hakki Eldem in Istanbul and along the Bosphorus, has been loaned and reproduced with kind permission of SALT Research and Rahmi M. Koc Archive in Istanbul.

The Department of Architecture of the University of Florence is particularly grateful to SALT and to Rahmi M. Koc, for this scientific cooperation, allowing to present these masterworks for the first time in Italy. Prof. F. Colliotti and Arch. S. Acciai wishes to thank cordially Dr. Lorans Tanatar Baruh at SALT and Prof. Paolo Girardelli who have taken part to the research with suggestions and stimulating comments aiding the text to grow. Last but not least a special thank to Prof. Edhem Eldem, who, at the beginning, let all this people meet together.

1 - 2
S.H.E. schizzi yali sul Bosforo, 1965, (Salt)

3
S.H.E. schizzi per la facciata della Social security agency complex, (Salt)

4
Ara Güler, in O. Pamuk, Istanbul 2008



4



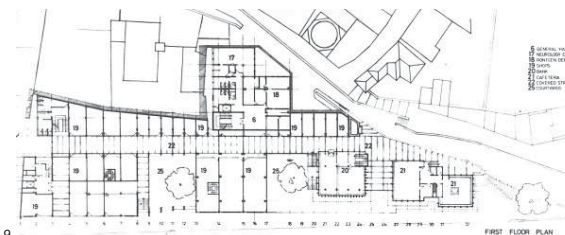
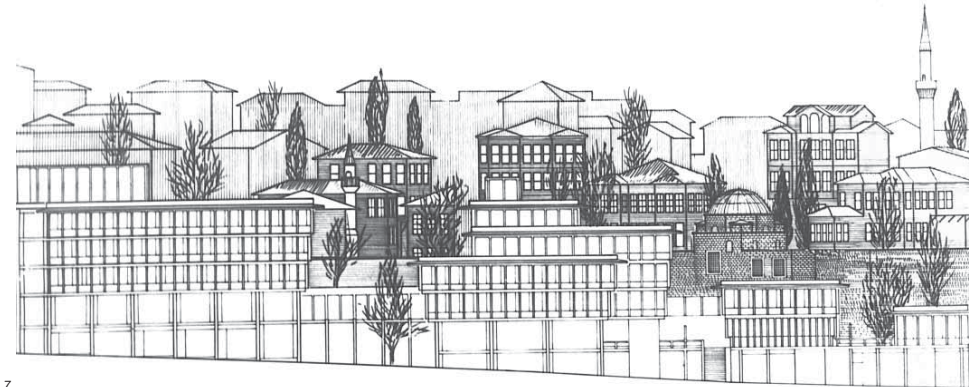
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Esterno della Social security agency complex, (Salt)
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Scorcio dal borgo di Zeyrek, (Salt)
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Fronte strada dall'Atatürk Boulevard, (Salt)
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Planimetria generale, social security agency complex, (Salt)
- 9
Pianta primo livello, social security agency complex, (Salt)

sull'area del gran palazzo degli imperatori di Bisanzio. Per lavorare su quelle che erano le sottostrutture del grandioso ippodromo romano a ridosso del Palazzo di Ibrahim Pasa, S.H.E. lavora e studia sulla pianta della città di Müller-Wiener quasi a cercare ancora, attraverso occhi occidentali, una chiave di lettura per quel luogo così denso di storia.

Per frammenti di città, per frammenti di paesaggio lavora S.H.E. prima fra tutte la Facoltà di Scienze e Lettere, il Palazzo di Giustizia a Sultanahmet, l'Hilton Hotel e persino la voglia europea dell'edificio per appartamenti a Taksim. Tutti progetti capaci di lavorare con l'antico, materiale da costruzione complesso e fascinioso. Parlando in termini di scala urbana la Social Security Agency Complex (1962-64), vincitore dell'Aga Khan nel 1986, è il progetto nel quale S.H.E. più lavora con il luogo. Il sito, sull'Atatürk Boulevard, è in prossimità del possente acquedotto romano, che si erge ancora tra il terzo e il quarto colle della penisola, e della bizantina chiesa del Pantocratore ed

è circondato dalla tradizionale *mahalle* (sobborgo di case in legno) di Zeyrek, uno dei distretti di Istanbul. In questo progetto per un complesso di uffici, è proprio la piccola scala delle tradizionali case di legno che costituisce il punto di partenza di un'architettura senza dubbio moderna ma sensibile al contesto sociale e culturale nel quale si trova. Organizzata su due livelli su una sorta di "strada interna" che costituisce la spina del progetto a livello distributivo e formale, quest'architettura fatta di blocchi di differente altezza e misura riesce a chiudere in maniera magistrale il lotto triangolare sul quale si trova e a far città col complesso agglomerato di Zeyrek che sale come un grappolo di case e stanze fino alla chiesa del Pantocratore. Si può dire che la pianta e l'alzato di questo edificio riescono a tenere insieme due tempi e due misure differenti, la pianta è antica mentre l'alzato si riferisce alla città contemporanea? Architettura a metà strada tra l'aggregazione spontanea, *mahalle* appunto,

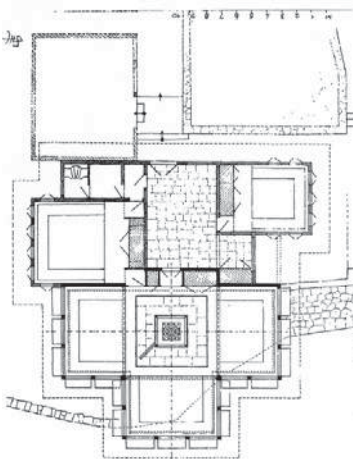
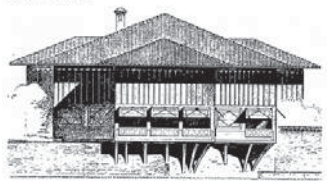
e la costruzione classica della città à la Perret. Progetto sensibile all'ambiente circostante in maniera dimessa, con piccoli segni e poco rumore. Un'antichissima fontana tenuta nel "nuovo recinto" con un gesto unico: e già questo edificio diviene un'architettura della città. S.H.E. si interroga continuamente col proprio lavoro sul tipo edilizio della casa turca. CASA TURCA? Una "costruzione occidentale? Questione aperta... come la stessa natura del termine "Turco" impiegato dagli europei per indicare le etnie culturali e religiose dell'eterogenea popolazione dell'impero ottomano. Non è infatti un caso che le prime rappresentazioni delle case turche nelle pubblicazioni europee coincidano con lo sbocciare dell'esotismo e della scoperta del diverso come punto centrale dell'autodefinizione dell'illuminismo e fu proprio la pubblicazione del lavoro di viaggiatori e artisti come Allow e Bartlett e dello stesso Melling che dettero le prime panoramiche vedute degli yali ovvero le grandi dimore in legno sul Bosforo.



Che S.H.E. prese come iniziale fonte d'ispirazione per il suo lavoro, una copia del *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore*, di Melling indica l'importanza delle rappresentazioni occidentali nella formazione del concetto della casa turca e l'importanza dei riferimenti intertestuali. S.H.E. scrive a proposito dell'Influenza bizantina e s'interroga su quali contaminazioni e suggestioni avessero incontrato gli ottomani prima di divenire Turchi cercando e indagando ancora, e sempre, la tipologia della casa turca, le sue origini e le sue caratteristiche da poter leggere/rileggere in chiave moderna. I grandi palazzi dell'antichità, a Istanbul restano come una sorta di traccia nel disegno successivo della città? Quella maniera di costruire la riva, dei palazzi degli imperatori, rimane nella storia dell'identità degli edifici sul Bosforo? Fatto certo è che S.H.E. col suo impegno (la classificazione sistematica delle architetture del Bosforo e, tra l'altro, la costituzione dei seminari di disegno e rilievo per

gli studenti dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Istanbul)⁶ e con i suoi progetti di nuovi yali sul Bosforo ha contribuito in maniera determinante alla memoria ed alla presa di coscienza del particolarissimo valore di questo patrimonio architettonico. Al principio l'Amcazâde Hüseyin yalisi, edificio che risale al 1689 e che può essere definito l'archetipo di questo tipo edilizio. L'attuale edificio che vediamo sul Bosforo, nei pressi di Anadoluhisari è solo un frammento dell'originale ed elaborata pianta del palazzo d'estate della famiglia Köprülü organizzata secondo l'usuale disposizione in *selamlik* e *haremlik*, qui però posti lontano l'uno dall'altro. Di tutta questa costellazione di elementi architettonici rimane soltanto questo edificio dalla pianta centrale che ruota intorno ad un fuoco mentre tutt'intorno si apre la *divanhane*, grande stanza fatta di basse sedute poste sotto le finestre che a ripetizione si aprono sul mare. *Tutto viene dall'Oriente* ha scritto L. Semerani "e forse dell'architettura antica si è nascosta la sua essenza sensuale, ma-

gica e illusionistica"⁷ ma in questo edificio sul Bosforo tutto è ancora manifesto, resta, infatti, nei secoli come un incunabolo dell'arte architettonica ottomana.⁸ Dall'archetipo alla messa in opera di una versione in chiave moderna di queste residenze sul Bosforo. S.H.E. negli anni '60 si trova ad avere la possibilità di progettare nuovi yali sul Bosforo per quella illuminata nuova committenza, industriali e uomini d'affari, che furono la naturale evoluzione, dell'élite ottomana che aveva rinnovato la pratica delle dimore sull'acqua, quella maniera di vivere sul bordo dell'acqua considerando il Bosforo quasi come "un teatro di vita" paragonabile in questo, al Canal Grande di Venezia. Benché queste commissioni coinvolsero S.H.E. per edifici individuali, il numero di quest'ultime divenne ad un certo momento così elevato che il contesto non poteva più semplicemente essere il sito di ciascun yali, ma diventava inevitabilmente una questione più corale, ossia l'immagine stessa dello skyline del Bosforo attraverso una ricostruzione per



10



11

frammenti delle due rive per mezzo degli yali come elemento principale.

È il caso del Suna Kiraç yalı a Vanıköy, costruito per una ricca famiglia di industriali turchi, in cui chiaramente è evidente la tensione moderna di S.H.E. nell'interpretare la tradizione. La logica modulare della griglia ordina la pianta e l'alzato e si estende anche all'esterno col disegno del pavimento listato in marmo bianco. Ancora una volta l'esterno si confonde con l'interno e la pianta procede da dentro a fuori con la possibilità di vivere la casa anche all'esterno in quello spazio tra la collina e il mare.

Casa concepita attorno ad un sofa, posto su livelli diversi e affiancato dalla libreria. All'esterno si mostra una cercata simmetria raggiunta per semplificazione formale. Ogni yalı di S.H.E. è prima di tutto un gesto verso il Bosforo.⁹ E si può forse parlare di risarcimento.

Questi lavori di S.H.E. s'inseriscono in un più ampio disegno che riguarda la salvaguardia di una memoria fatta di tipi edilizi tradizionali rivisitati e a volte trasfigurati che giungono così a nuovi valori di significato. Il retro della casa

trova una quota leggermente diversa e con i volumi dei camini che fuoriescono dal filo dell'edificio va a configurare il lato di servizio dell'edificio ma anche lo spazio esterno che comprende la piscina e il giardino d'inverno. Il disegno totale, con la verticalità proporzionata delle aperture dalle finiture bianche e le persiane in legno è una riflessione lunga sulla casa turca tutt'altro che vernacolare e parrebbero dialogare da lontano con alcune ricerche di Perret (il viaggio fu apprendistato anche per S.H.E., ma su questo occorrerà tornare, non qui...). Declinazione del tipo in funzione del luogo è invece l'esempio del Şemsettin Sirer yalı a Yeniköy, differente dalle allungate piante delle dimore ottomane, veri e propri palazzi sull'acqua, questo edificio occupa un lotto molto stretto ed ha un limitato affaccio sul mare sensibile però alla misura e al carattere degli yalı tradizionali. Distribuita su quattro livelli la pianta della casa è una rilettura in chiave moderna dell'architettura dei vicini villaggi di Arnavköy o Bebek dove gli yalı sul Bosforo erano non solo ville, ma anche case di pescatori. Il tema

diventa qui il salone passante risolto su quote differenti che attraversa la casa dalla strada fino all'affaccio sul mare. L'immagine che ne deriva, quella vista dal mare che tanto fascino aveva sui viaggiatori del Bosforo, è un gesto leggero, un'architettura che tiene insieme più storie: facciate bizantine e caratteri dell'architettura spontanea legati qui da un linguaggio moderno con alcuni rimandi loosiani. Ancora una particolare rivisitazione di questo tipo edilizio che tiene conto della memoria del luogo e delle caratteristiche dello stato attuale. In ogni stagione, ad ogni ora, restano gli yalı come frammenti felici di una città, non sempre oggi in trasformazione serena.¹⁰ Città delle Città, durissima e di rara bellezza allo stesso tempo, mutevole nello spazio di un isolato; rappresentata oggi in Ekümenopolis,¹¹ film che fa luce sull'architettura passata e presente di questa città, oltre il mito e il pittoresco, guardando verso quale direzione si rivolge la metropoli contemporanea con le sue contraddizioni e i suoi gap sociali. Città delle Città in cui le opere di Sedat Hakkı Eldem rimangono ancora elemen-



ti a cui ancorarsi, architetture per le persone, espressioni compiute di una Città, Bisanzio, Costantinopoli, Istanbul.

¹ Silvia Ronchey, Tommaso Braccini, *Il Romanzo di Costantinopoli*, Einaudi, Torino 2010.

² Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul*, Einaudi, Torino 2008.

³ Silvia Ronchey, Tommaso Braccini, *op.cit.*

⁴ Le questioni qui affrontate sono parte di una più generale ricerca in corso di elaborazione presso la Scuola di Dottorato, Architettura Progetto e Storia delle arti, dal titolo *Bisanzio - Costantinopoli - Istanbul per frammenti di grandi idee, il caso studio di Sedat Hakkı Eldem*, tutor Prof. Francesco Colliotti e co-tutor Prof. Paolo Girardelli. Tale lavoro trova un più ampio riferimento nell'indagine su architettura, archeologia e paesaggio da tempo in atto col titolo *Mediterraneo come contaminazione* (F. Colliotti con S. Acciai et al.).

⁵ Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, Tübingen, Wasmuth 1977.

⁶ Cfr. Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *Le yalı de Kocaoğlu a Bebek sur le Bosphore*, Istanbul, Vehbi Koc Vakfı, 1975. Cfr. Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *The yalı of the Bosphorus - Anatolian side*, Vehbi Koc Vakfı, Istanbul 1993. Cfr. Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *The yalı of the Bosphorus - European side*, Vehbi Koc Vakfı, Istanbul 1993.

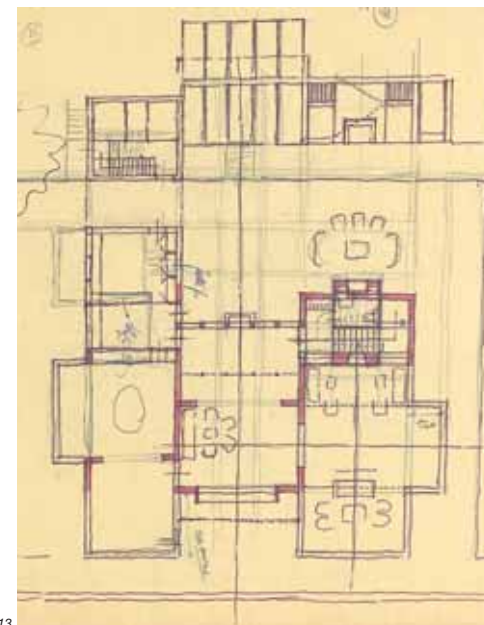
⁷ Luciano Semerani (a cura di), *La casa forma e ragioni dell'abitare*, Skira, Milano 2008.

⁸ È lo stesso Sedat Hakkı Eldem a partire dalla documentazione di Fossati che studia, rileva disegna e propone una ricostruzione dell'Amcazade Hüseyin yalı in: S. Ünver, Sedat Hakkı Eldem, *Amcazade Hüseyin Pasa Yalı*, Türkiye Turing ve Otomobil Kurumu, Istanbul 1970.

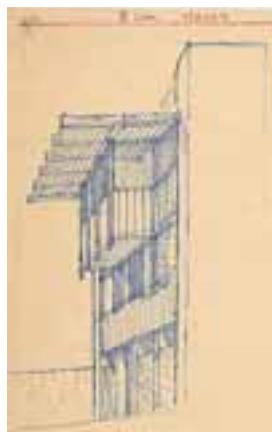
⁹ Sibel Bozdoğan, *Sedat Eldem: Architect in Turkey*, Concept Media, Singapore 1987.

¹⁰ Nazim Hikmet, *Les Romantiques*, Les éditeurs français réunis, Paris 1964.

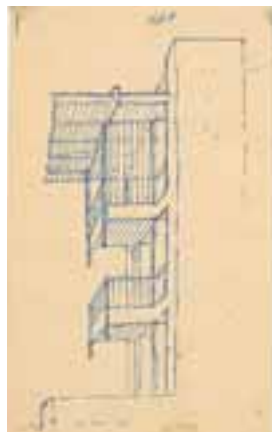
¹¹ *Ekümenopolis Turkey 2011*, documentary film by Imre Balani.



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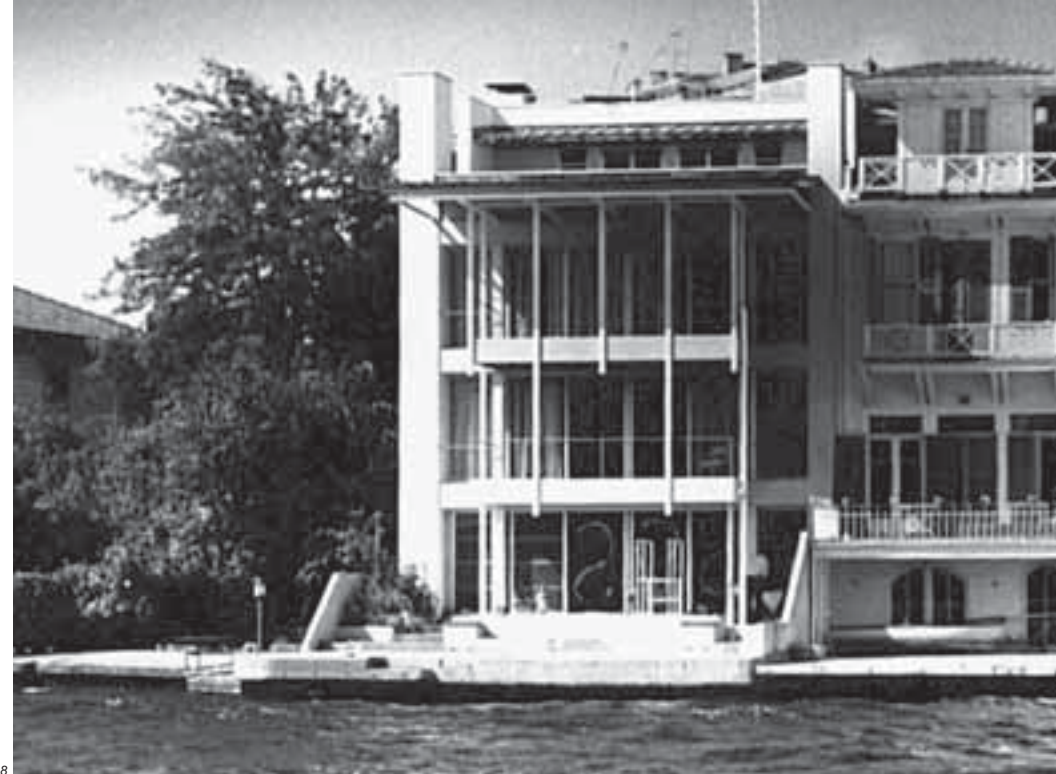
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maximum expression of the human evolution, structures shown cruelly like a new way to think and aesthetic act. We have to considering also other references, other architectures nearer to us and to Bonadé, in which the typological topic of the helical ramp has been wide developed and perhaps own also to these the planner watched in the action to conceive such solution: between many without a doubt deserve to be remembered the sixteenth century Cisternone in Turin that Bonadé it was sure to acquaintance and the similar Antonio da Sangallo's Pozzo di San Patrizio. In an interview, the architect engineer asserted as the original idea had had origin from a conversation with Giovanni Agnelli, but the equilibrium between functional necessity, invention and reference has never not been cleared.

The construction, some notes

The Torre reinforced concrete realization roots its origins in the Bonadé Bottino research when he was a calculating assistant of the Lingotto's construction manager and in the influences that at that time leaked from France where the Auguste Perret extraordinary works had already found the right critic consecration and after the great Exposition of Turin in the 1911. The use of the famous *Hennebique* system, kind of *ante litteram* pre-conpression, guaranteed a fast realization of great structures characterized by planning flexibility, fire resistance and a durability that, at the time, was thought almost infinite. The realization of the entire structure finished in only hundred days, in the same way of already concluded Sestriere Tower, for which Bonadé gained 500 Liras of that age by a Giovanni Agnelli bet, which supported would have been impossible to realize the building in only four months. Considering only the fourteen coils that form the continuous ramp also that represents in section the vertical building development, would be enough in order to show which is its value in a period in which mounds and frameworks were realized by wood and the loads majority were lifted by arms. The rooms, in origin zenithally illuminated by a glassblock cover, follow the ramp development and the furniture inside, indifferent to the floor inclination, composes the spaces in such way that every house has on hand a defined portion also inside a promiscuity proper of this structures type, where the educational/recreational aim was favored and developed by the architecture at least. The building foundations demonstrate the Bonadé skill in the material and own characteristics use. The distribution of vertical loads from the perimeter towards the center, through the use of concrete struts, has allowed to a better foundation order, smaller pinched sections and a higher digging set up level. The entire structure rests on compacted sand, probably previously concrete stirred to increase the compression resistance.

Modernity

Thirties are maturity age of the architectonic development, not only in Italy but all around the western world in its complex. The consolidation of the new technical knowledges, the asserting of an unknown media arts influence inside of the immense society cultural section, has been the stimulus for which works like *Torre Fiat* that have had the way to be built up. The events course that allowed all this, seems annihilated inside a apparently unsurpassable fencing, constituted by myopic considerations in the field of an idealistic landscape protection, from national normative needs for a long time and, where was not enough, also supranational beyond that from a contemporary society exponential cultural and its technical knowledge impoverishment. Such symbols of modernity live by now its existence like musealisation, in a kind of the *icon condemnation*, an eternal damnation far to reflect other things that not be the same tautology of own presence, nearly to the limit to be an end in itself, or also unsurmountable block. Sad to think that today if also were well-off and illuminated purchaser, also if the technical and normative problems were exceeded, also it was possible to cross any administrative impediment, Fiat Tower in that place, in that way, would not be come true. To the architects of today, sort of *children of a lesser God*, it does not remain that to watch *Torre Fiat* like a contemporary *Hercules Column* and, in the same way of the classic world sailors, think that beyond it nothing can.

A room with the sea inside

Piero Bottini - Project for Villa Ludolf, Marina di Massa, 1941

by Andrea Volpe

(page 108)



"This Villa is inspired by the spirit of the old Roman Domus: the balance of their architectural masses, their loggias, their hallways and terraces; the open air life style of those Mediterranean populations [...] This Villa will not become a

barrier for the landscape, but it will let it gently enter inside; the sea and the mountain will be seen from its ground level atrium like in a frame of a picture..."

With these words Piero Bottini describes "Villa Latina". His entry project for "A Modern Villa for one family", a design competition organized by the IVth International expo of modern industrial and decorative arts of Monza in 1929. This proposal finds its main feature in Bottini's explicit intention to deeply root the project in the site. A statement literally translated into the ground floor hall, an interior space which symbolically treasures the landscape like a precious gem.

According to this concept the Villa becomes "a threshold placed between the

sea and the pinewood, described in Bottini's drawings as it gently grows on the steep hills of Bonassola, where the Villa is ideally placed [...]. The whole idea of *limen* generates the project plans, its ratio, its status of architecture exactly placed in the context. This image, which allows the Architect to conceive the ground floor like a deep stage - comprised between two different backcloths, at the upper level is blurred into an ideal line linking the bedrooms and the living rooms."¹

Twelve years later, a few kilometers south of Bonassola, the Ligurian seaside village chosen for that conceptual project, Bottini will design another mansion. Completely different in terms of architectural typology, circulation layout, plans and character from Villa Latina, but surprisingly similar in the way it is carefully shaped to react with the landscape. In the case of Villa Ludolf that of the Apuan riviera.

A comparison between these two projects, both sharing a residential theme, becomes significant if we consider them as crucial episodes in Bottini's career: not only marking his debut and the professional success of the '30's/'40's, but demonstrating his extraordinary capability to explore in a deeper and wider way those aspects commonly discussed in the contemporary Italian Rationalism scene. Bottini's ability to set dialogues both with the traditional code of architecture and with the different characters of the place - a gift received by his mentor Piero Portaluppi - will lead him to refuse easy clichés or any modernist mannerism. An attitude which often will lead him towards isolation.²

Suitability, balance and sensitivity for the context. All features we can recognize in this 1941 project for Countess Ludolf, where the landscape forms the architectural figures as well as the latter enhance the qualities of the landscape itself. Like in mutual reflection of images, architecture and site are not separable one from the other, being necessary one to the other.

In a plot of land placed along a wide boulevard parallel to the coastal line, Bottini decides to build two courtyards. The minor one (dedicated to the staff rooms) is opened towards West. The main one, facing the living room and dining room, is rotated towards South in order to frame the view of the Tyrrhenian sea. The whole building is placed on a podium (partly made with rocks, partly with stabilized ground). In such a way the main patio is raised at the level of the wall protecting the property from the strong sea winds. An embankment with a grove of trees links the level of the living room with the west side of the garden. On the opposite side two fly of stairs and a ramp link the patio and the entrance loggia to the pinewood. Due to the presence of the podium, the view of the sea from the patio is completely liberated from the presence of the cars running on the avenue, apparently busy even in the '40's.

Like an analog beach, the southern courtyard can now simulate a fictitious proximity with the sea. Only from the belvedere it is revealed the real distance which separates the patio from the shore. Surrounding this huge open air room, bordered on the western side by a rocky wall pierced with frame-less windows, Bottini organizes the 3-bedroom wing (with its portico on the eastern side) and the living room/dining room area.

On one corner of this 'L' shaped figure Bottini places the main entrance. A vestibule where the rendez-vous of the two wings of the mansion is sublimated through the opposition of two huge windows, both framing the different characters of the northern Tuscan coastal landscape.

In a similar way to "Villa Latina", Bottini conceives the entrance lobby as a stage, where the view of the pinewood trees - with the stark profile of the Apuan Alps in the background - meets the presence of the sea, with its blue sky and its far horizon. Transforming the atrium into an emotional, poetic, space.

¹ G. Consonni, *Progetto di Villa Latina, IV Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne di Monza, Concorso 1929-30*, in Piero Bottini, *Opera completa*, G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti and G. Tonon (Eds.), Fabbri Editori, Milano, 1990, pp. 166-167.

² See G. Tonon, *Isolato in Piero Bottini, Opera completa*, G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti and G. Tonon (Eds.), Fabbri Editori, Milano, 1990, pp. 9-49.

Hassan Fathy, the desert poetics

by Viola Bertini

(page 120)



Through the open door out the big window opposite you could see the wasteland stretching into the distance, its thick darkness unrelieved by a single glimmer of light. Its impressive silence broken only by occasional laughter borne in on the dry and refreshing breeze - forceful and clean, like the desert itself - that blew between the window and door.

Nagib Mahfuz, *The thief and the dogs*, 1961

The architectures of Fathy rise from the desert, they take their root in the ground.

The desert is a concrete place and a symbolic space, a meeting point between the earth and the sky which has

shaped the culture of the Arabic people. The heat, the light, the sandstorms and the djinn, evil spirits carried by them, are elements to shelter from, closing the house from the outside and opening it to the inside, towards the court looking at the sky. Fathy writes that architecture is the result of the interaction between man and his environment, when man is called to satisfy his own needs, both physical and spiritual, and that the proper environment for an Arab is the desert. In the answer that man gives to this hostile climate the Egyptian architect finds the origins of his own culture, the shape of his own houses, the structures of his own cities. Fathy looks

at the past, at the craftsmanship and at the language of tradition. A tradition that is a collective heritage gained with difficulty, a body of rules and codified spatial systems, which takes an operative and creative value. All this doesn't exclude the role of invention, a term understood in its Latin sense of *discovery*, as a founding act at the base of the designing process.

Hassan Fathy was born in Alexandria in 1900; when he was eight he moved with his family to Cairo, where he graduated at *King Fuad I University* in 1926. The choice of looking at tradition, which is the base of his poetics, develops in a specific artistic and intellectual context. Indeed, starting from the Twenties, different groups of artists rise in Egypt. They are all part of a cultural trend moving from the request for political independence in search of a new national identity. An identity which is found both in the cultural roots of the country and in the rural world. The privileged subjects of representation are scenes from everyday vernacular life, often mixed with issues and features borrowed from the ancient wall paintings. The idealized image of the villages, the attraction for myth and the narrative vocation is always accompanied by the belief that Egypt will rise again from its origins and from a sleeping Mediterranean past. In opposition to the clichés of *Orientalism*, that is the vision that the West has of the East, languages able to express a feeling of authenticity are experimented.

In the same way, the research Hassan Fathy leads with his work is a search for appropriateness: the appropriate form of dwelling in relation with a user who is not anonymous, the appropriate architectures in relation with the context. But the context itself is, in this case, an invention. It is the result of a process of abstraction aiming to build an idea of place, referring to the Arab-Islamic world as a whole. According to this, the watercolours of Fathy, whose production is developed in parallel with the proper design drawings - more technical and aimed at building - are a sort of *manifesto*. Subject of these pictures are glimpses of vernacular architectures, stage designs depicted as Persian miniatures, fantastic landscapes, pharaonic scenes and building projects where the coexistence of plans and elevations directly refers to antiquity. In the latter, in particular, there is a superimposition of logic and poetry: the two-dimensional representation coexists with a narrative dimension, carried by the symbolic elements. Thus, in the watercolours for New Gourni there appears the fertility goddess *Hathor*, whose presence is intended to be a good omen for the success of the project, the Isis which protects the homes and the sycamore tree which means regeneration. On the whole, what is put up is an imaginary and idealized world in which the limits between past and present are confused and whose undefined spatial horizon covers the basin of the Arab-Islamic *koiné* as a whole. The specificity of the site is denied in favour of the idea, what emerges is the spirit of the place. Thus, the poetry of Hassan Fathy wants to aspire to the universal as regards the cultural background of reference.

Likewise, its architectural paradigms are not unique, but, looking at models that go beyond the immediacy of the place, they refer to a common substrate, which is placed by the architect at the base of a collective identity. Fathy's architectures are the result of a composition of forms, shapes, decorations, technological devices, materials and types codified in the bosom of tradition. The definition of such a repertoire of elements partly moves from a simplified reading of the historical city, in order to identify the persistence of the marks common to different contexts, capable of defining the generic character of the Islamic architecture. These elements are partially discovered in the dimension of a trip. The trip in the rural Delta, where farmers build their houses with sun-dried earth bricks, and the trips in the region of Nubia, where the entrances of the houses are decorated with *claustra* carved in the mud and where the ancient ability to construct domes and vaults without the use of formwork still remains. In some degree, again, these elements derive from the study of the medieval quarters of Cairo, but also of Rabat, Marrakech and Tunis, from the observation of Arab noble mansions and, more in general, of court architecture. Their transposition, be it geographical or semantic, is justified either by the use of examples from history or by functional reasons and is often carried by the use of the technique of analogy. Thus, for example, the use of the Nubian vault also in very different contexts is legitimized both by constructive reasons (it makes possible to cover areas up to three meters without using materials different from earth, which are expensive and not available in loco) and by quoting the granaries of the Ramesseum in Luxor or the Coptic necropolis in Bagawat or the Fatimid cemetery in Assuan as evidence of the deep reasons rooted in time for this architectural element. The use of the vault in Egypt dates back to its origin and therefore its use is valid in spite of the context. Otherwise, the use of the *grand layout* of Qa'a room for the humble room of the peasant, as well as for housing units in urban situations, is legitimized by its symbolic value and by the worthiness as climate device that this special system assumes. However, its repeated use as a compositional unit, particularly in the project of rural houses, causes an emptying of meaning of the element itself, which loses its primary function of representation and its uniqueness, remaining as a memory of shape.

Finally, the assemblage of these invariant elements, extrapolated from the many traditions which the Arab-Islamic tradition is made of, conceived according to often pre-defined rules and answering criteria varying from time to time, gives rise to the architectures of Fathy and build the contexts in which they take place. From the assemblage of morphological memories and in the rut of tradition comes the plan for the village of New Baris (1965), a small town in the middle of the New Valley, south of Kharga Oasis. Designed to accommodate 250 families and to work as a model settlement in a program of urbanization of desert lands, like the other villages by Fathy, it remained unfinished. The few accomplished buildings rise today like a ruin from the sand, the material of which they are made and to which they are slowly returning.

The urban structure, elementary in its parts, gives up the complexity of the ancient city in favour of a strict hierarchy of the inner residential open spaces. In fact, the system of the pedestrian paths and of the semipublic courts suggests a new reading of the traditional village. This system does not only think about social relationships and family identity, but also about the movement of the human body in space and about the dynamics of visual perception, put in relation with the apparently irregular configuration of the streets.

The linearity of the main routes, orthogonal as in a new foundation city, contrasts these irregular configuration. They are mainly designed to respond to vehicular requirements and they go along with the shape of the ground, thus following a pre-defined rule that is antithetic to the one which internally orders the parts the city is made of.

The houses - both for farmers, employees or administrators - are all usually built around a central empty space. This is because Fathy identifies the fundamental characteristic of the Arab house, and more in general of the Mediterranean house, with its introversion. Basically they are the result of the juxtaposition of invariant special systems extrapolated from the tradition, be it noble or rural, and articulated around the core composition of the court.

Public buildings, instead, condense into a centre working as a hinge between the two parts of residential tissue and set up as pieces of the city. The planimetric configuration of each of these buildings recalls a consolidated typology, assuming a representative value compared with the totality of the urban plan. As in the case of residences, the courtyard, the introversion resulting from that and the juxtaposition of figures in plane and space define the nature of public buildings. As characters having their own individuality and, at the same time, bound together by a narrative sequence of repeated elements, the public buildings enliven a scene that, once again, alludes to a specific idea of place, which is expression of a generic Arab feeling.

On the whole, the New Baris project is emblematic because, when studied by the architect both at the urban scale and the architectural one, it shows that process of synthesis and abstraction which is the base of Fathy's architectures. In fact, it moves from a broad repertoire of elements coded in different historical and geographical areas, but all related to a similar cultural dimension, makes a choice between them and, through their assemblage, builds a new context and new architectures.

The ultimate consequence of this process is the invention of a new language, the reinvention of tradition itself.

Last stop Constantinople

by Serena Acciai

(page 136)



Istanbul, the city where geography provokes history wrote Brodskij, Pera, Stambul, Scutari - a trinity for Le Corbusier, *The fairy of the thousand lovers* for the Turks, *Ummeluniá*, the mother of the world in the Koran, *Three in One* for Umberto Eco, who explains how the city emerged as a mythical and fascinating place for the Western World when it became the symbol of Ottoman grandeur and capital of the Muslim Antichrist.

And perhaps this is the way that through the centuries the myth of Constantinople is born, through the eyes of those who had reached her, the travelers, the writers, and the architects who loved, described, and designed her, and who thus contributed to increasing her allure. *City of the cities* for some; for Mehmet II who conquered her she was a dream and a desired bride for many years, as for N. Hikmet who never ceased to sing of her throughout imprisonment and exile.

City that is built up upon herself and *that lives as she always has lived, not by substitution but by addition*. City where the ancient is truly a source of design, *whose karma is in being a crossroads of civilization*, that Bridge that Pamuk too sees in his Istanbul. In this port which is in reality a mosaic of ports, in this city made up of many cities that in the end are only one, there exist characteristics which distinguish the architecture: above all the constant presence of water, even as a horizon which runs through the constructed fabric, and then the legacy of the ancient city, that is the erosion of classicism as a principle of architecture.

Sedad Hakkı Eldem, architect of Istanbul, who worked for and with Istanbul for all his long life, realized in the metropolis on the Bosphorus his greatest architecture. Fragments of constructed city which are integrated as contributions of Modern into that genealogy of architectures that lead to the evolution of the city in time.¹ Aristocratic architect, descendant of a wealthy Ottoman family, Eldem was educated between Munich and the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul and early in his career began to design the great architecture of the city, beginning with the Topkapı Palace. Eldem read his city as an Ottoman but also above all through the surveys, drawings, and engravings of Western scholars.

Particularly important are Müller-Wiener, German archaeologist who through surveying rediscovered all of Sultanahmet, bringing the past to life, and L.Melling, German architect who in the XIX century arrived in Istanbul for a brief stay and remained 18 years to sketch views of the Bosphorus.

Eldem was intimately involved in the architectural and urban experiences of the city and her memory. He worked for Istanbul through those elements which A. Rossi defined constitutive of the architecture of a city - *monuments and houses* - and today his works remain scattered throughout the city as exemplifications of

the image of the epoch and society which Eldem wanted in a way to capture and make available to the masses.

This is never more evident than in the elaboration of the Sultanahmet Courthouse, a project which stretched on for 20 years, so greatly stratified was the architecture on the grounds of the Grand Palace of the Emperors of Byzantium. To work on that which had been the substructure of the grandiose Roman Hippodrome nearby the Ibrahim Pasa Palace, Eldem worked on and studied the map of the city of Müller-Wiener almost as if seeking, through Western eyes, a key to reading that place so steeped in history.

Fragments of the city, fragments of her cityscape Eldem worked on the Faculty of Science and Letters, the Sultanahmet Courthouse, the Hilton Hotel, and the apartment complex of the European longings in Taksim, all projects which enabled him to work with the historic, a fascinating and complex construction material.

Eldem's work on an urban scale bore great fruit with the project for the Social Security Agency Complex (1962-64), awarded the Aga Khan in 1986. The site, on Atatürk Boulevard, is nearby the mighty Roman aqueduct which still rises between the third and the fourth hill of the peninsula and the Byzantine Church of the Pantocrator and is surrounded by the traditional *mahalle* (wood house suburb) of Zeyrek, one of the districts of Istanbul. In this office complex project, it is precisely the small scale of the traditional wood houses which specifies the departure point for an architecture undoubtedly modern but sensitive to the social and cultural context in which it befalls. Organized on two levels on a sort of "internal road" which makes up the backbone of the project on a distributive and formal level, this architecture formed of blocks of different heights and sizes manages to enclose the triangular lot on which it is built in an imposing manner and to forge a city with the agglomerated complex of Zeyrek which rises like a cluster of houses and runs up to the Church of the Pantocrator. Can it be said that the plan and the elevation of this building manage to hold together two different times and two different scales, the plan being historic while the elevation refers to the contemporary city?

Architecture halfway between spontaneous aggregation, as in the *mahalle*, and the classical structures of the city à la Perret. A design sensitive to the surrounding environment in a demure manner, with small signals and little fanfare. A significant, historic fountain kept in the "new enclosure" - a single gesture and instantly this building becomes architecture of the city.

Eldem continually wonders about the work on the building type of the Turkish House. TURKISH HOUSE? A "Western construction"? An open question... as is the nature of the term "Turkish" employed by the Europeans to indicate the cultural and religious ethnicities of the heterogeneous population of the Ottoman Empire. In fact it is not a coincidence that the first representations of Turkish houses in European publications coincide with the blossoming of exoticism and the discovery of the different in the search for self-definition within the Enlightenment, and it was precisely the publication of the work of Western travelers and artists such as Allow and Bartlett and Melling that dictated the first panoramic views of the yali, those grand wood dwellings along the Bosphorus.

That Eldem took as an initial source of inspiration for his work a copy of the *Voyage pittoresque de Constantinople et des rives du Bosphore* of Melling indicates the importance of Western representations in the formation of the concept of the Turkish House and the importance of intertextual references.

Eldem wrote about the Byzantine influence and wondered what contaminations and suggestions the Ottomans might have found before becoming Turks, seeking and investigating as always the typology of the Turkish House, the origins and the characteristics which might be read/learned in a modern light. Do the great buildings of the past remain in Istanbul as sorts of footprints in the successive design of the city? Does that manner of constructing the waterfront, the Emperors' Palaces, remain in the history of the identity of the buildings on the Bosphorus?

It is certain that with his endeavors (the systematic classification of the architecture of the Bosphorus and the establishment of survey and design seminars for students of the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul, among others) and with his designs for the new yali on the Bosphorus, Eldem contributed in a decisive manner to the memory and the acknowledgement of the highly particular value of this architectural heritage.

It all begins with the Amcazade Hüseyin Yalisi, structure dating to 1689 which can be defined the archetype of this kind of building. The building which can now be seen on the Bosphorus, near Anadoluhisari, is only a fragment of the original and elaborate plan of the summer estate of the Köprülü family, organized according to the usual disposition in *selamlik* and *haremlik*, here however placed far apart from one another.

All that remains of this constellation of architectural elements is the building with a central plan which rotates about a fire while all around the *divanhane*, a great room made up of low seats placed under the windows that repeatedly open onto the sea, unfolds.

All comes from the Orient wrote L. Semerani ["and the sensual, magic, and illusionary essence of ancient architecture is hidden"] but in this building on the Bosphorus all is still manifest; in fact it remains throughout the centuries as an incunabulum of Ottoman architectural art. From the archetype to the realization of a modern interpretation of these residences on the Bosphorus Eldem in the 60's finds himself with the opportunity to design new yali on the Bosphorus for that new, illuminated clientele, industrialists and businessmen who were the natural evolution of the Ottoman elite and who had renewed the practice of the dwellings on the water, that manner of living on the water's edge treating the Bosphorus almost as a "theater of life", comparable in this to the Grand Canal of Venice. Although these commissions engaged Eldem for individual buildings, at a certain point their number became so great that the context could no longer be confined to the site of each yali; it inevitably became a more chorale question, or rather the image of the skyline of the Bosphorus through a reconstruction of fragments of the two banks wherein the yali were the principal element.

This is the case of the Suna Kıraç yali in Vanıkoğlu, constructed for a rich family of Turkish industrialists, wherein the modern tension of Eldem in the interpretation of tradition is clearly evident. The modular logic of the grid prescribes the plan and the elevation and extends to the outside with the design of the pavement edged in white marble. Once again the outside blurs with the inside and the plan proceeds from inside to outside with the possibility of living in the house on the outside as well, in that space between the hill and the sea.

A house conceived around a *sofa* (a hall, constituting the distributive space and the focal point of the traditional house), placed on different levels and flanked by bookshelves. On the outside it shows a refined symmetry attained by formal simplification.

Each yali of Eldem is first of all a gesture towards the Bosphorus. And perhaps we can speak of recompense.

These works of Eldem weave into a broader design which regards the safeguard of a memory made up of traditional building types revisited and at times transfigured thereby achieving new values of significance.

The backside of the house encounters a slightly different altitude and with the volumes of the fireplaces which spout from the profile delineates the building's service side but also the outdoor space which includes the pool and conservatory. The complete design, with the proportioned verticality of the white-finished openings and the wood shutters, is a studied reflection on the Turkish house anything but vernacular and seems to dialogue at a distance with some of the researches of Perret (travel was also an apprenticeship for Eldem, but this is a theme which it would be necessary to discuss further, and not here).

Exemplification of the type in function of the place, instead, can be found in the Şemsettin Sirer yali in Yeniköy. In contrast with the lengthened plans of the Ottoman dwellings, true waterside buildings, this structure occupies a very narrow lot and has a limited overlook on the sea, although it is sensitive to the scale and character of the traditional yali.

Distributed on four levels, the plan of the house is a reinterpretation in a modern key of the architecture of the nearby villages of Arnavitköy or Bebek where the yali on the Bosphorus were not necessarily villas, but also the homes of fishermen. The theme herein becomes the grand hall resolved on different heights which passes through the house from the road down to the seafloor. The image which derives from it, that view of the sea which had such allure for the travelers on the Bosphorus, is a light gesture, an architecture which holds together various histories: Byzantine facades and characters of the spontaneous architecture linked here to a modern language with some references to Loos. Yet another particular revisitation of this building type which takes into account both the memory of the place and the characteristics of the current state.

In every season, at every hour, the yali rest as happy fragments of a city which today is not always in serene transformation.

City of the Cities, possessing great toughness and rare beauty at the same time, mutable in the space of a city block.

Visited today by Ekmünopolis in a film which sheds light on the architecture past and present, the city is shown beyond the myths and the picturesque, and we look at where she is headed with her contradictions and social gaps.

City of the Cities in which the works of Sedat Hakkı Eldem remain elements of anchorage, architecture for the people, expressions formulated by a City- Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul.

¹ The questions herein addressed are part of a more general research project undertaken at the Doctorate School of Architecture, Design and Art History, entitled *Byzantium - Constantinople - Istanbul by fragments of great ideas, the case study of Sedat Hakkı Eldem*. Tutor: Prof. F. Colotti, co-tutor: Prof. P. Girardelli. The project draws from a broad range of investigations in architecture, archeology, and landscape in progress for some time with the title *Mediterranean as contamination* (F.Colotti with S.Acciai et al.)

The history of Jerusalem on the stones of the Tower of David by Cecilia Luschi

(page 144)



Nearby the Jaffa gate, the gate of Christians, according to the tradition, opposing it to the Muslims gate - Damascus gate - stands the Tower of David. The tower witnessed in 1099 Tancred of Antioch's consignment of the city to Godfrey of Bouillon, the Latin king. The citadel is deployed around the tower built by David, from which he saw Bathsheba: a biblical place that so many efforts contributed to keep, maintain and restore. The site shows an impressive amount of Herodian structures, dating back to the 1st Century. The place has always had an extraordinary impact on collective soul: when Saladin in 1187 declared his intention to destroy it, the whole population, setting aside the different religious beliefs, stood up in defence of the tower, preserving it. Thanks to them we can still admire one of the most ancient fortified buildings in Palestine.

Beyond the historical aspects, witnessed by archeological evidence, the sense of appartenance and identity of the population has always elected this place as a symbol for its national memories.

High walls enclose several structures, starting from Herod's to Baldwin's and Otto-

man castles: the place is now an Israeli cultural site, where a copy of Verrocchio's David, donated by the city of Florence to the city of Jerusalem, can be admired. It's a very special corner in Jerusalem, a place whose sacrality is trusted by people of all three monotheistic faiths: not a common feature, indeed.

We can really say that we are in front of a history witness which can easily tell us its own true story, provided we want to listen to it. If our eyes are capable of deciphering the multithreaded patterns of its composition, we will be able to listen to the voices of those who left their traces on walls, building techniques and symbols, during a thousand years.

The Tower of David is known as being an Ottoman building in its upper portion, standing upon Phasaël, one of the three towers built by Herod on front of his own palace, as a defence structure. In 1120 the Crusader king chose the Tower as his royal palace: a choice full of symbolic meanings. We can read its description, written by Fulbert of Chartres, Baldwin's chaplain until 1127: he describes it as a wonderful building, made of well-squared stones, soldered by molten lead, up to a half of its height. He tells us that the tower, well equipped and with about twenty soldiers, was practically impregnable.

What we presently see shows no major alterations: we still can notice the exuberant mass, out of proportion with respect to the other elements of the citadel walls. The former studies do not offer details about the resting of the tower and the citadel, made by the Crusaders, focusing on the Turk intervention in 1335 when the minaret was added. If our goal is to reassess the different components in such a complex building, we need to take into consideration further historical elements.

After the Holy City loss, in 1189, we must wait until Frederick II to have Jerusalem opened again to Christians. This was obtained thanks to a strong diplomatic work, without war actions: sometimes, this is considered as a victory of Frederick and Hermann von Salza; other opinions think of it as a devilish covenant with Muslims. Beyond these historical quarrels, in March 1229 Frederick becomes King of Jerusalem: he was a direct heir of the Altavilla family, with a strong connection to Tancred, who entered the Jaffa Gate.

What is the real link between these events and the Tower itself?

Our work is based on minuscule architectural evidences, that so often are classified as of secondary importance, but that now can well describe the history of this omphalos of the world destiny.

In the inner side, directly set on the bulk body of the Tower of David, we find a wall which is by common opinion considered a Herodian one. Going straight for about 20 meters, it bends at 90 degrees towards a circular basement in the opposite corner of the internal court of the citadel.

The Herodian wall is built by mid-size stones, each of them having a surrounding stripe and an overall raw finish. Luckily, we can see the same wall, through an opening, in the area of connection to the Tower. It is easy to notice the strong difference between the wall texture in the lower part of the Tower and this wall, joining to it. The wall shows also some filling materials introduced between the different stone rows, a technique used by Crusaders to keep the horizontal level constant. This technical feature makes evident the different interventions on the structure, easily noticeable looking at the different sizes of the stones.

This means that the original 1st Century structure encounters a Crusade times wall, whose length defines a quadrilateral area having the Tower of David in the North corner, counterbalanced by a circular tower in the South.

This layout could better justify the position of the wall base reinforcement in the corner near the Jaffa Gate.

A functional and a formal analysis both lead to a typical medieval intervention, probably dating back to 1120, in the times of the Royal Palace settlement in the citadel. For sake of completeness, we also notice that some ancient maps identify the citadel as the Pisan Castle, a building surrounded by circular towers, except for one of them.

This tradition is in agreement with what we encounter and read from the structure of the site. The evidence is more striking if we take into consideration the composition of the whole structure.

Close to the aforementioned wall and to the Tower of David, we find a square tower, related to the rooms of the donjon, which shows evident, even if archaic, gothic features. This terminal section of the tower is commonly attributed to the Ottomans, but its intrinsic style well agrees with European Latin design.

The gothic hall in the present top level of the donjon shows undoubtable resemblance with similar buildings by the military orders of the Crusaders. We notice a T plan with acute arch vaults, with a cross vault over the entrance area, as well as the splay openings on the sites, or the protruding square corner stones, intended to house the thickness of the lime: all these details converge to a layout belonging to the Chivalric orders, with the Christian Tau symbol. The internal layout of the tower, with its cross, shows the kingly standard layout of the palatine chapels. We could think of a complex architectural superposition, inside the citadel, which transformed an almost empty space into a medieval fortified castle, easily defended by its natural position but also an incumbent presence over the city of Jerusalem. The wall reinforcement of the Tower of David, rooted in the trench in front of Jaffa Gate and the internal road, along the walls.

If all our doubts tend to concentrate towards the neat image of a wonderful crusader castle, we get first hand confirmation by the analysis of the stones, as each of them, if adequately well preserved, shows a cross symbol. Neat crosses, with constant style and size, showing the origin of this part of the structure and compelling all of us to reconsider in depth the history of this building.

The cross which excited scandal in Jerusalem, arises new scandal here, in the wrinkles of this ancient walls. Nobody noticed these symbols on the wall, always credited to Herod, and no one had seen the crusader castle inside the citadel, a castle probably set by Baldwin.

Frederick II probably worked on the Tower of David, already modified by the Latin King, adding the external wall reinforcement and transforming the watch tower into a tower capable of resisting an attack coming from the city itself; the hall we admire is probably the same room where he was king, for one day at least. So, this stone tower, which was never David's one but which was Frederick's - and he wanted to be a next David - looking to the Holy Sepulchre to the North, to the Temple esplanade to the South, is a real crossroad of history and time, indispensable to understand the extraordinary unicity of the city of Jerusalem.